Joelle Sano Gilmore, Ph.D.; Michelle Jeong, Fashina Mira Alade, Amy B. Jordan, Ph.D.; and Shonya Kidd

Local News Media Framing of Obesity Before and During a Public Health Media Intervention

Abstract:

News media’s framing of obesity may affect individuals’ interpretation of public health initiatives that are designed to address health risk behaviors (Hatley-Major, 2009). The present study examines local news media’s framing of obesity in newspaper, television, radio, and magazine stories (n=167) preceding and surrounding a city-wide anti-obesity public health media campaign. Local news media, overall, attributed blame and assigned responsibility for obesity to individuals (episodic framing). However, government was presented as a contextual agent that is connected to the obesity “problem” in 40% of all stories. After the launch of the campaign, local news media were significantly more likely to frame food/beverage companies and champions/advocates as contextual agents, and were less likely to frame obesity in terms of economic disparities. Researchers conclude that thematic framing of obesity increased after campaign messages began airing, and suggest that public health officials consider the potential impact of news framing when designing media interventions.